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ACTION OF ATTACK PLANES (STORMOVIKS) AGAINST
ENEMY AIRFIELDS

Guards Col F. Tyulenev
Hero of the Soviet Union

Air attacks against airfields are very complex operations because attacking aircraft have to fly a considerable length of time over enemy territory in the face of antiaircraft measures. The variety of these measures (fighters, anti-aircraft fire and machine guns, aircraft warning service and radar) requires the use of different tactical methods.

The group commander, organizing attacks against airfields, must choose a flight course to ensure precise approach to the target, concealment of approach, and surprise of attack. He has to determine altitudes at various stages of the flight and the point for crossing the front line. He then establishes combat formations, the method of approach to the target, and the time of assault.

The best example of proper consideration of the situation and correct organization and execution of attack is represented by the action of Stormoviks against three German airfields in the Crimea on 7 April 1944. Several days before the attack, exact information was received on the concentration of enemy air strength at airfields, and also on the location of enemy aircraft and anti-aircraft guns. The Stormovik group prepared for an attack against the Veselyy airfield, where up to 90 aircraft were concentrated, mostly Ju-87 bombers and FW-190 fighters. In addition to the total number of aircraft, fliers knew such details as exact location and parking order of aircraft at the field. About 40 Ju-87s were located on the northern and northeastern edges of the field in caponiers. Fighters were parked in the western part. Aerial photographs showed that four to six fighters always were ready on the runway. The airfield was defended by three batteries of medium antiaircraft guns, seven batteries of small-caliber guns, and about ten single antiaircraft installations of the Oerlikon type.

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The commander of the Stormovik group, after evaluating the situation, decided to approach the target from the west. The course was plotted with two sharp turns, permitting by-pass of the front line at Perekop over the seat out of enemy visual range and an approach from the direction of enemy territory. The selected approach course had no antiaircraft defense and the approach from the enemy's rear would disorient the warning service. The attack was to be launched at 1730 taking into consideration the position of the sun at that time. Escort fighters landed at the Stormovik airfield since an air rendezvous would require additional consumption of fuel by the Stormoviks, an unfavorable factor under the circumstances.

The tactics were elaborately rehearsed on the ground and later in the air over the Stormovik field. As a result of the dry run and critique, the crews knew their job and almost no radio instructions were necessary.

Radio was used only during the assembly over the home field to check communications with other groups and with the fighter escort. Other radio communication was prohibited and could be used only at a distance of 5-8 kilometers from the target. Thus, concealment of the flight was attained.

The combat formation was as follows: One group, flying at 1,250-1,300 meters, was to attract the attention of the enemy and served for target orientation of the other two groups which followed the first group in flight close to the ground (hedgehopping). In addition, the first group was to damage the concrete air strip with heavy bombs in order to hamper the take-off of fighters.

Air cover was divided into two echelons. The first of them flew with Stormoviks of the first group, and the second echelon was the cover for the main attack group. For better concealment of the main group, its escort fighters flew 1.5-2 kilometers behind the first group and at the same altitude. Such a formation could disorient the Germans, creating the impression that only one group of Stormoviks approached covered by fighters in two echelons.

The tactics against the field were designed mainly to achieve surprise on the approach of the first group of Stormoviks, thus giving them an opportunity to suppress main antiaircraft defenses and also to act against enemy aircraft on the ground. Actually, the attack was executed according to plan. The Stormoviks did not meet any opposition on their way to the target. The Germans did not expect the appearance of aircraft from the direction chosen. Antiaircraft guns did not open fire until the first group of Stormoviks was already over the airfield and had begun its attack. The assault of the main Stormovik group was so sudden that antiaircraft artillery personnel dispersed at the beginning. Only during the second approach did the enemy open up with disorganized fire.

A few days after the raid, the airfield was abandoned by retreating Germans and the exact results could be observed. More than 20 aircraft had been destroyed. In addition, the large fuel depot and engine and spare-parts depot were burned down, the repair shop was demolished, and several antiaircraft guns were damaged.

In conclusion, it must be noted that this type of action requires intensive and thorough preparation and an individual approach in each separate case.

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